

National

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Puplick quits after claims of favours

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The president of the Anti-Discrimination Board, Chris Puplick, resigned last night after it was revealed he had been investigated over claims he helped a friend win a payout for anti-gay victimisation at work.

The allegations were revealed yesterday, less than a day after the Premier, Bob Carr, launched a vehement attack in Parliament, describing a report on racism prepared by Mr Puplick as "tendentious, ideological claptrap".

It is understood that an interim report on the allegations has been prepared by the NSW Ombudsman, and that Mr Puplick's resignation - which will take formal effect on May 16 - will give him time to respond formally to the allegations.

Last night, a spokeswoman for Mr Carr denied the Premier's attack was in any way related to the claims and the resignation.

In a statement late yesterday, Mr Puplick denied that he had acted improperly, and insisted that his resignation as board president and as NSW Privacy Commissioner was fuelled by the deterioration in relations with the State Government.

"The Premier himself has been critical of the work of the board and I believe it is not possible for the board to be an effective advocate for human rights in NSW in the absence of his personal support," he said.

"Allegations have been raised in the press which call in to question my impartiality and integrity in relation to the handling of a case in which the complainant was known to me personally.

"I reject utterly any implication that I acted improperly in this case. An email sent by me, which I admit should not have been sent in the terms it was, has been seriously misconstrued, a number of false implications have been read into it. These matters are now in the hands of my personal solicitor."

The allegations were based on emails, published in a Sydney newspaper, which suggest Mr Puplick gave priority to his friend's discrimination complaint against a Sydney television executive. The leaked emails also suggest that Mr Puplick had dined with the complainant.

The shadow attorney-general, John Ryan, questioned the timing of Mr Carr's attack on the board's report on racism in the media, *Race for the Headlines*, and the leaked emails.

He said that while he supported any investigation into alleged impropriety, he believed the Government had unfairly attacked Mr Puplick more than once.

"There is possibly room for suspicion [about the timing]," he said.

Mr Ryan said an attack by the former justice minister, Richard Amery, on Mr Puplick in Parliament last year over a board investigation into a privacy complaint raised by the backpacker murderer Ivan Milat was also unjustified.

It is understood the relationship between Mr Puplick and Mr Carr had deteriorated since then.

The board's part-time members yesterday expressed sadness, shock and regret at Mr Puplick's decision.

Neither the Ombudsman's office nor the Attorney-General's Department would comment.

The director-general of the Attorney-General's department, Laurie Glanfield, will take over Mr Puplick's board responsibilities until a formal replacement is named. Mr Puplick, a former Liberal senator, was appointed in 1994 by the Coalition government and reappointed by Labor.